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ABSTRACT

Suggested guidelines for the effective implementation and operation of advisory committees for the humanities at community colleges are provided in a question-and-answer format. The guide first defines the advisory committee as a coterie of individuals assigned the task of providing guidance in a particular area of interest. It then examines: (1) the role the humanities advisory committee can play in providing visibility for the college and its humanities program; (2) the selection of committee members from among individuals outside the educational profession; (3) the responsibilities undertaken by the committee to assist the college in relating its humanities programs to the needs of the community; (4) the educational questions which should be addressed in performing those responsibilities; (5) the administrative steps in planning committee formation; (6) the responsibilities of the committee chairperson, secretary, and college representative; (7) the need for committee members from within the college administration to familiarize other members with the humanities programs at the college; (8) the necessity of devising an annual program of activities for the committee; (9) the procedures involved in conducting committee meetings; (10) the items to be addressed in committee agenda; and (11) criteria for evaluation of advisory committee effectiveness. (JP)

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ADVISORY COMMITTEES FOR THE HUMANITIES

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Center for the Study of Community Colleges

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ADVISORY COMMITTEES FOR THE HUMANITIES

What are advisory committees? How do they function, and for what purposes? Who are their constituents? What are their responsibilities? What will they accomplish for the humanities in Washington community colleges?

This paper, which was developed by the Center for the Study of Community Colleges for the Washington State Board for Community College Education, presents information useful for the formation of advisory committees for the humanities in community colleges. It answers some basic and important questions that might be asked regarding the development and implementation of these special committees. Background materials for this paper were obtained from the Washington State Council on Vocational Education, the California State Department of Education, and several articles disseminated by the ERIC Clearinghouse for Junior Colleges at UCLA.

WHAT IS AN ADVISORY COMMITTEE?

An advisory committee is comprised of a coterie of people, who, as the name suggests, advise another group, division, or institution on pertinent issues for example, licensure requirements. This type of group has become almost a tradition in those secondary schools and two-year colleges that offer vocational/technical programs. The notion of an advisory committee for the humanities, however, is relatively new, and some

of the objectives and purposes of such a group will differ in emphasis and intent from advisory committees to the vocational/technical programs.

WHY AN ADVISORY COMMITTEE TO THE HUMANITIES?

1. To provide advice not readily available elsewhere.
2. To provide visibility for the college and its humanities programs.
3. To provide important information to the public regarding special events, programs, etc.
4. To offer advice and support for policies from the point of view of people outside the college.
5. To aid in the placement of students and graduates.
6. To assist in keeping the humanities programs current.
7. To speak for the humanities program at college and community meetings.

WHO SHOULD SERVE ON AN ADVISORY COMMITTEE?

The size of the advisory committee should be left to the appointing authority (s). Generally, the size will be determined by the particular college needs, size of the institution, size of the host community, and strength of the humanities within the college.

Members of advisory committees are selected from among individuals who are outside the educational profession and, except for the college representative, are always outside the host institution. An advisory group to the humanities might, for example, include such people as a museum director, librarian, bank official involved with the arts, business men and women who are active in the local performing arts, artists and musicians, and directors of radio and television stations.

Persons appointed to an advisory committee for the humanities should possess knowledge of the community and be aware of the philosophy of the college. Either as an occupation or in an extra-vocational sense, members should be interested in at least one facet of the humanities: cultural anthropology, art, cultural geography, history, literature, philosophy, music, political science, religious studies, theater/film, or in the humanities in general. They should be visible in the community, and should have the time and inclination to act as a college advisor. In addition, if the college has occupational instructors who are interested in the humanities, they would be welcome additions to the humanities advisory committee.

Provision for rotation of members of advisory committees should be made in the committee's guidelines. One popular rotation method calls for replacing one-third of the advisory committee each year. Thus, when the committee is first formed, one-third will be given one-year appointments, one-third two-year appointments, and one-third three-year appointments. This method thus provides for both continuing and new members each year.

WHAT ARE THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE?

Because education for young people and adults requires the best cooperative effort of the college and the community, educators must understand the needs of both the students and the community. The board members, prominent citizens in the community, will help bridge the gap between "town and gown", and will integrate educational efforts with community offerings and opportunities. Some advisory committee members may be in a position to employ students who are completing a community college program, or of suggesting avenues of employment. Others will

show that the arts and humanities can become ar integral and integrated part of life, whether one pursues them as an occupation or as a non-vocational interest.

An advisory committee can provide invaluable information and support to educators who are developing or operating college programs. Most advisory committees will perform the following functions:

1. Assist educators in the development of goals, objectives, and activities for their programs.
2. Help students and graduates find jobs.
3. Assist teachers in relating instruction to the needs of the community.
4. Help develop and implement public information programs.
5. Advise as to the adequacy and appropriateness of facilities, equipment, and teaching materials.
6. Assist in developing community surveys related to the humanities.
7. Advise in the development and use of cooperative education training plans and agreements.
8. Recommend criteria for evaluation of programs.
9. Promote the humanities as an essential part of every citizen's life.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE MAJOR QUESTIONS TO BE ADDRESSED?

1. Who are the students in the humanities courses?
2. How can more students be encouraged to enroll in these courses?
3. How could humanities modules be developed for occupational courses?

4. What types of extra-curricular humanities offerings can be established by the colleges?
5. How can the colleges relate to humanities offerings off campus - e.g., museums, libraries, concerts?
6. Should humanities courses be developed that are specific to the community - e.g., history of the arts, local Indian Tribes?
7. Are courses offered at convenient times for students who also work outside the college?
8. Could the committee provide awards for an outstanding faculty member and outstanding student?
9. What are the potentials for internships and jobs for students in the community?
10. How can the importance of the humanities in everyone's life be emphasized?

WHAT IS A PLANNING GROUP'S ROLE IN SETTING UP THE COMMITTEE?

The effectiveness of an advisory committee may be determined by the amount of constructive planning that has taken place before the organization is actually implemented. In planning for an advisory committee, college administrators should:

1. Appoint a college group to start the process.
2. Get college board approval.
3. Decide who to invite.
4. Schedule meeting time and place.
5. Invite participants by mail and follow-up with telephone calls.
6. Appoint an interim secretary to record proceedings of the first advisory committee meeting.

WHAT ARE THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE VARIOUS MEMBERS?

The members should include the chairperson, secretary, college representative, and selected community members.

The Chairperson

The chairperson's principal function is to preside at all meetings of the committee. The chairperson, elected by the committee, and college faculty members should work closely together in determining key issues to be discussed in the meetings.

To a large extent, the chairperson's conduct at advisory committee meetings will determine the effectiveness of the committee. The chairperson will delegate many of his/her duties to the secretary or other members of the committee, but the chairperson is still responsible for the following functions:

1. Prepare a suitable agenda.
2. Provide background information as necessary.
3. Preside at meetings.
4. Establish meeting dates, and notify the committee members.
5. Initiate action based on decisions made at meetings.
6. Provide reports as required.
7. Maintain necessary personal contacts with members.

The Secretary

The secretary is an important member of the advisory committee and should have a close working relationship with the other members. This person should:

1. Understand the college humanities offerings and be aware of the relative importance of issues and objectives.

2. Be able to explain the programs, courses to others.
3. Be sensitive to the viewpoints of others.
4. Be able to organize detailed material into a meaningful whole.
5. Have a facility for writing.
6. Be able to motivate college administrators or faculty members to provide necessary information for the committee's work.

The secretary may be elected by the committee from among its membership. In view of the considerable routine, time-consuming work entailed in this person's responsibilities, however, it is recommended that a college representative be chosen for this position. Most members of the committee do not have the necessary time to do the job, whereas college representatives should be paid by the institution to perform such functions.

The secretary is responsible for the preparation and mailing of announcements, minutes, and other salient information to committee members, college personnel, and others who must be kept informed of committee activities. The importance of accurate and neatly prepared reports and letters should not be minimized; the timeliness of announcements and feedback following meetings is equally important.

Minutes and other records of advisory committee activities should be filed at the school. These should be available for review by authorized personnel for as long as five years.

The College Representative

The community college representative (s) should be involved with the humanities and eager to stimulate them. A high standard of professionalism is required at all times in order to maintain the confidence of the committee. This person should be willing to meet at a time best

suited to the committee.

The institutional representative usually has administrative responsibility for the humanities programs/courses served by the committee, and thus may be able to take direct action on the committee's advice. The assignment of college staff to advisory committees is a function of the college administration. Representatives should apprise committee members of college activities, programs, and special issues, and should also inform members of the progress of specific courses.

Since an advisory committee to the humanities will serve a department or several closely related divisions, the department/division head usually represents the college. Key faculty members and/or other department chairpersons may also be assigned to serve as official college representatives. Instructors other than the official college representative meet with advisory committees only when invited, usually on a rotational basis because having several instructors regularly in attendance might stifle free discussion and thus interfere with the committee. They attend meetings in order to elaborate on their instructional programs, provide information not generally available, and primarily, to receive - not to give - advice.

The college representative (s) should familiarize committee members with the functions and objectives of the humanities programs and courses. It is unrealistic to expect new members to be acquainted with the general philosophy of the college and/or to possess a working knowledge of the educational programs with which they will be involved. Some advisory committees to the vocational programs have been handicapped because school/college authorities did not recognize the necessity of

having an informed group and made no plans for orientation. Members were therefore unable to appreciate the methods used by the institution in achieving its objectives, or to interpret the program to the public.

The college representative should work with the chairperson in seeing that the advisory committee acts as an advising rather than an administrative agent. He/she should not usurp the functions of the advisory committee by such actions as initiating programs without consulting the advisory committee, taking action within the realm of committee's designated functions without first consulting the committee, and failing to inform the committee of facts pertaining to the program. College representatives should not set too broad a scope of objectives for the advisory committee, or allow the committee to deviate too far from the original objectives. They should avoid the use of privileged information by the committee members for their own benefit or profit, and they should heed the committee's recommendations. Appropriate action should be taken as soon as possible on each recommendation. If the proposals are not approved by the college, committee members should be told why.

HOW DOES THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE FUNCTION?

Keeping the local advisory committee functioning does not happen by chance. Good intentions must be accompanied by both motivation and direction. The committee must know what it is to do, why a particular task must be accomplished, when the task is to be completed, and, for its own satisfaction, how well it performed its functions. These procedures can not happen unless there is cooperation among the college, the college personnel, and the advisory committee.

Designing an annual program of work for the advisory committee, therefore, must be a joint effort. Proper planning by and guidance from the college and its personnel can eliminate many of the frustrations that have caused some vocational education advisory committees to fold. Although humanities advisory committees are needed, work, boredom, or time press may cause failure. College personnel must remember that committee members are contributing their time and thus present only those issues relevant to the committee's purposes.

Planning normally begins with a responsible central administrator, generally the college representative. By listing program needs, certain areas or concerns can be identified and recommended to the attention of the advisory committee. In recommending activities, specific goals and objectives must be stated, strategies for their attainment developed, and some means of evaluation recommended.

WHAT TYPE OF AGENDAS SHOULD BE PREPARED FOR MEETINGS OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEES?

A typical agenda for the advisory committee might include:

1. Introduction of all members.
2. Brief review of the total college educational efforts.
3. Brief explanation of the humanities programs and special activities that are offered by the college.
4. The relationship of the advisory committee to the program/ special activities.

5. Report of previous meetings or reading of minutes.
6. Reports of subcommittees, if any.
7. Specific topics for discussion.
8. Future plans for expansion of a specific program or activity.
9. Organization of the committee (for the first meeting of the year especially.)
   a. Selection of chairperson and secretary.
   b. Selection of dates and times for meetings.
   c. Adoption of rules to govern the conduct of meetings.

HOW DO ITEMS GET ON THE AGENDA?

The best agenda items are those of greatest interest to all members of the committee. Items may be suggested by the college administrator, an instructor, or by individual committee members. Agenda items must be of interest to the college.

WHO TAKES CHARGE?

The chairperson is the dominant figure in the advisory committee meeting. He or she should work closely with the college representative to plan procedures carefully.

It is the chairperson's responsibility to see that the meetings start promptly, proceed effectively, and close when the designated closing time has been reached. If the agenda has been carefully planned the meeting becomes a business-like process of developing recommendations for the college. Poorly organized agendas can be distracting and annoying to committee members.

The following questions should be considered by the chairperson and college representative:

1. What is the purpose of the meeting?
2. Who are the participants, special guests, or speakers?
3. Can the group be employed for purposes of planning the meeting?
4. Does the agenda cover the subject adequately?
5. Is there sufficient time to send notices to all who will attend?
6. Will adequate meeting facilities be available?
7. Can the necessary materials and aids be assembled?
8. Have plans been made to report the results?

WHAT ARE THE PROCEDURES IN CONDUCTING EFFECTIVE ADVISORY MEETINGS?

Effective advisory committees meetings are the result of careful, thoughtful planning. All members of the committee should be made to feel that they are important members of the team. The success of the chairperson will depend somewhat on general knowledge, sensitivity, and the ability to perceive types of behavior in meetings that lead to failure or success. Effective meetings require chairpersons who anticipate potential pitfalls and who, by careful but subtle maneuvering, succeed in keeping the group on track and channeling the discussion toward concrete results.

In laying the foundation for successful advisory committee meetings, some general guidelines may be helpful in assuring the success of the advisory committee. These pertain to individual members as well as the committee as a whole.

1. Accentuate the positive.
2. Aim for full attendance at meetings by notifying people

in advance.

3. Call the meetings at regular intervals.
4. Always present a clearly designed agenda.
5. Provide effective leadership.
6. Provide a comfortable setting for meetings.
7. Be certain that procedures are recorded.
8. Refrain from setting oneself up as final authority.
9. Avoid pressuring the group.
10. Use language that is readily understood.
11. Assure members of confidentiality of opinions expressed in meetings.
12. Encourage participation by all members.

HOW ARE THE MEETINGS EVALUATED?

Evaluations of an advisory committee should focus on the meeting. They are most valid when made a day or two after the meeting has taken place. The chairperson, the secretary, and the college representative who attended the meeting could form an evaluation team of convenient size. Questions forming a basis for evaluation might include:

1. Was the agenda appropriate?
2. Was the meeting conducted satisfactorily?
3. What were the principal outcomes?
4. Did the items on the agenda evoke interest and discussion by the committee?
   a. Were they understood by all members?
   b. Were they considered valid, within the committee's field of interest, and important?
5. Was the back-up material sent out in time, and in proper form,

to orient each member prior to the meeting?

6. Was the meeting room adequate for the meeting?
7. Are plans moving ahead on suggestions made at the meeting?
   a. Are the minutes ready to be mailed?
   b. Have all items needing special attention been identified? Who has this responsibility?
   c. Is the college prepared to keep the commitments made to the committee members?
   d. Are there special tasks, reports, or assignments that call for immediate attention?
8. Was the committee qualified to address the question (s)?
9. Did the committee reflect a knowledge of the underlying problems before rendering advice or suggesting a solution?
10. Based on the way the committee handled this problem, what other college problems should be directed to it?
11. In retrospect, should this problem have been handled by an advisory committee?

Obviously, the effectiveness of an advisory committee can not be judged on the basis of a single meeting. The influence of an active committee frequently reaches deeply into the community, and its contributions are not always tangible. Consideration should be given to such matters as field trips for students and faculty arranged by committee members, scholarships, job placements, curriculum involvement, participation as guest lecturers or speakers at college events, and the many other activities in which so many advisory committee members give generously of their time and expertise.

We hope that this preliminary question/answer paper will be useful in formulating advisory committees for the humanities in Washington state. It is time that the humanities look to new modes of support, and advisory committees might well supply that support and offer new avenues for integrating the college with its community resources.

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